

Coronation Ode, op 44

A work for soprano, contralto, tenor and bass soloists, chorus and orchestra, with words by A C Benson, in six parts :

1 - Introduction : Crown the King

2 - (a) The Queen; (b) Daughter of Ancient Kings

3 - Britain, Ask of Thyself

4 - (a) Hark Upon the Hallowed Air; (b) Only Let the Heart be Pure

5 - Peace, Gentle Peace

6 - Finale : Land of Hope and Glory

Approximate Length: 35 minutes

First Performance:

Date: 2 October 1902

Venue: Sheffield Festival

Conductor: the composer

Dedicated to: HM King Edward VII

Elgar's star was in the rapid ascendent when, in January 1901, Queen Victoria died. Despite the early failure in Britain of *The Dream of Gerontius*, he had had marked successes in quick succession with the *Enigma Variations* and the first two *Pomp and Circumstance Marches*. The latter in particular captured the mood of a nation both elated and relieved at the recent successful conclusion of the Boer War, and the new king, Edward VII, had taken a personal interest in Elgar's music. When, in the Autumn of 1901, the Covent Garden Grand Opera Syndicate decided to commission a work to be premiered at a Royal gala on the eve of King Edward's coronation, Elgar was the obvious choice as composer.

Elgar readily accepted the commission and work progressed smoothly. This was in part due to the choice of Arthur (A C) Benson as librettist. Benson came from an established literary family and was himself a keen amateur musician. Although the words now seem insensitive and overly nationalistic, they suited the times and Elgar's music well. The partnership was notably close and successful.

After a performance of the first *Pomp and Circumstance March*, King Edward had suggested to Elgar that words should be provided to the Trio section so that it could be sung. Despite strong advice to the contrary, notably from Jaeger, Elgar took up the King's suggestion and asked Benson to provide words so that the tune could form the climax of the Ode. Thus was born *Land of Hope and Glory*, known throughout the world as a rousing climax to *The Last Night of the Proms*, the series of promenade concerts held in London from July to September each year. Having settled on the finale, Elgar and Benson proceeded to work on the remaining sections. At a late stage, it was realised that the Ode contained no reference to Edward's wife, Queen Alexandra. So, almost as an afterthought, *Daughter of Ancient Kings* was added between what had been intended as the first two movements of the work.

The Ode was completed by the beginning of April 1902, in good time for Edward's coronation, scheduled for 1 July. But in late June, the King was suddenly taken ill with appendicitis, forcing the postponement of the coronation. The Ode thus received a provincial premiere at the Sheffield Festival in October of that year, where it was sung by the Sheffield Choir, probably the leading British amateur choir of the time who were to have sung the work at its intended London premiere. The work was an immense success, bringing Elgar a status unprecedented for a British composer at that time and leading to honours from several British and American universities and, in 1904, a knighthood.

The work was revived for the coronation of King George V in 1911. Since *Daughter of Ancient Kings* related specifically to Queen Alexandra, Elgar produced a second piece, *The Queen*, again with Benson's words, for George's wife, Queen Mary. Although this was intended as an alternative to *Daughter of Ancient Kings*, both pieces are now normally included in performances of the Ode.

But, perhaps of greater significance, so attached was Elgar to the finale that he asked Benson to provide alternative words for a new arrangement of the tune as a self-standing song for solo voice. It is the chorus to this arrangement, first sung by Clara Butt in London in June 1902, that is sung at the Last Night of the Proms. Few who now join in these celebrations realise that the somewhat jingoistic words they sing are two steps removed from the full orchestral version of the Pomp and Circumstance March to which they sing them. The two sets of words are as follows :

Coronation Ode

*Land of Hope and Glory,
Mother of the Free,
How may we extol thee,
Who are born of thee?*

*Truth and Right and Freedom,
Each a holy gem,
Stars of solemn brightness,
weave thy diadem.
Tho' thy way be darkened,
Still in splendour drest,
As the star that trembles
O'er the liquid West.
Throned amid the billows,
Throned inviolate,
Though hast reigned victorious,
Though has smiled at fate.*

*Land of Hope and Glory,
Fortress of the Free,
How may we extol thee,
Praise thee, honour thee?*

Land of Hope and Glory

*Dear Land of Hope, thy hope is crowned
God make thee mightier yet!
On Sov'ran brows, belov'd, renown'd,
Once more thy crown is set.
Thine equal laws, by freedom gained,
Have ruled thee well and long;
By Freedom gained, by Truth maintain'd,
Thine Empire shall be strong.*

*Land of Hope and Glory,
Mother of the Free,
How shall we extol thee,
Who are born of thee?
Wider still and wider
Shall thy bounds be set,
God, who made thee mighty
Make thee mightier yet.
(God, who made thee mighty
Make thee mightier yet.)*

*Thy fame is ancient as the days,
As Ocean large and wide;*

*Hark, a mighty nation
Maketh glad reply;
Lo, our lips are thankful,
Lo, our hearts are high!
Hearts in hope uplifted,
Loyal lips that sing;
Strong in faith and freedom,
We have crowned our King!*

*A pride that dares, and heeds not praise,
A stern and silent pride.
Not that false joy that dreams content
With what our sires have won;
The blood a hero sire hath spent
Still nerves a hero son.*

Land of Hope and Glory, etc